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ABSTRACT

The speaker outlines some approaches to educational accountability (among them model testing, relating test scores, differentiated staffing, program auditing, instructional accountability, management by objectives, and performance-based education) and suggests what needs to be done in the future in regard to accountability. (IRT)

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ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

George B. Redfern

Accountability means many things to many people. In the 1960's it began its meteoric rise in the educational world. Boards of education, school administrators, and national educational leaders hailed its advent as a long sought-for means of enabling schools to give more precise answers to persistent questions about how they were doing in the delivery of educational services to their constituents.

Advocates in the U. S. Office of Education - especially Dr. Leon Lessinger - gave impetus to the idea that accountability in education was an idea whose time had come and perhaps was overdue.

Publications such as AASA's An Administrator's Handbook on Educational Accountability, began to appear. Each made a convincing case for school systems to embark upon programs that would focus more precisely upon different approaches to accountability.

The role call of states that moved to initiate comprehensive programs of accountability is too long to recount here, but programs in Colorado, Florida, and Michigan have attracted sustained attention over a long period of time.

School systems hastened, either with outside consultant assistance or on their own, to get on the bandwagon. Management by Objectives, Performance Contracting, Performance-Based Education, Program Planning Budgeting Evaluating Systems, Long Range Planning, Program Evaluation Review Technique, Voucher System Education and others gained momentum as examples of varying approaches to accountability.

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Today, the literature on the subject is extensive. Some accountability systems have succeeded; others have failed. The reasons are varied. Often programs were too hastily instituted. Sometimes, the various components in the educational organization were less than enthusiastic or supportive. Teacher association leaders often charged that accountability programs were management conceived, developed, and installed without full involvement of teachers and, anyhow, the accountability concept was calculated to put the "responsibility monkey" on the backs of teachers. Nevertheless, there has been sufficient success to indicate that approaches to accountability in education should continue. Parents, citizens, legislators, and taxpayers, in general, want more - not less - accountability. The question still is how best to achieve it.

My part in this program is to deal with the general aspects of the topic. My colleagues will focus upon some of their experiences with accountability, pointing out both pitfalls to avoid and pathways to follow in order to achieve the greatest success.

The following are some of the approaches to educational accountability:

Model Testing - One approach has been to design and test various models in actual practice. There are too many of them to describe each. One that has endured, over time, and has attracted considerable attention is the Cooperative Accountability Project of Denver, Colorado (a seven state, three-year project started in 1972 by Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, and Wisconsin. A full report of the accountability laws of these states can be obtained in the booklet Legislation by the States: Accountability in Education. Inquiries can be addressed to the State Educational Accountability Repository, Department of Public Instruction, Madison, Wisconsin.

Releasing Test Scores - The possibility of releasing test score results created waves among school administrators in the late sixties and early seventies

when the National Assessment Program was being launched. Time has allayed some of those apprehensions and some school systems are releasing test score results as a means of accounting to parents and public for the progress of students, at least in certain areas of study.

Some early examples of school systems doing this were the Tulsa City Public Schools, Columbus and Toledo, Ohio, Public Schools, and the New Rochelle, New York Public Schools.

Differentiated Staffing - Differentiated staffing with its more explicit delineation of levels of responsibility for teachers has been another way to make accountability in teaching more meaningful and measurable. School systems such as Sarasota County, Florida and Mesa, Arizona Public Schools have gained nationwide attention for their efforts in this approach to accountability.

Program Auditing - Program auditing has developed as another technique to make accountability operative. Typical programs were developed in the Dallas Independent School District and by the EPIC Diversified Systems Corporation of Tucson, Arizona.

Instructional Accountability - Efforts to achieve instructional accountability gained impetus with leadership coming from such institutions as the Center for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California at Los Angeles, the North Carolina State Department of Education, and the Bucks County Public Schools at Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

Management by Objectives - MBO has caught on and has spread across the country in varying degrees. Workshops and conferences to explain the concept and hasten its growth and development have proliferated. The concept remains popular and is one of the most widely used methods to achieve accountability in educational management.

Performance-Based Education - Colleges and universities, in their teacher education programs, and national associations concerned with the preparation of teachers and administrators, embarked upon various types of programs of competency-based preparation. In addition, competency-based certification has been tried in some state departments of education to make the accountability concept more applicable in teacher preparation and certification.

External Performance Contracting - Such organizations as Education Turnkey Systems, the Rand Corporation, and as many as 50 other private companies moved to make performance contracting a viable approach to accountability. The fact that the pathway is strewn with documented failures and that the process is substantially discredited by OEO's own research, performance contracting will be remembered for a long time as an approach to accountability that promised more than it could produce.

Internal Performance Contracting - Some school systems ventured into an arrangement with groups of teachers to enter into contracts to achieve certain student gains under terms somewhat like contracts with private sector concerns. Though not widespread in application, some systems such as Cherry Creek School District, Englewood, Colorado and Mesa Public Schools, Mesa, Arizona attracted widespread attention with this approach to accountability in education.

PPBES - Program, planning, budgeting, evaluation systems gained momentum in the late 60's in many school systems especially as a result of the pioneer work of Dr. William H. Curtis in a national project sponsored by the Association of School Business Officials of the United States and Canada.

PERT - Program evaluation review technique was promoted at such institutions as Northern Arizona University at Flagstaff and the Educational Program Management Center at Ohio State University in Columbus.

Voucher System - Another approach to accountability that attracted attention was the voucher plan which purported to put school systems on their metal so that they could compete for the enrollment of students who would be attracted by the kinds and quality of the programs offered. This approach also appeared more promising, at the outset, than time proved it to be.

Long Range Planning - Obviously an approach that is very much alive and well today is long range planning. Its successful achievement is at the heart of the accountability concept. I shall defer to Dr. Goode to describe the virtues of this means of achieving real accountability in education.

Decentralization/Community Control - For sometime now, advocates of decentralizing large bureaucratic school systems and placing more control in the hands of the local communities have argued that this is the route to greater accountability, at least in large school systems. The results, so far, of this approach certainly are far from conclusive.

There can be, and undoubtedly have been, abuses in the exercise of power under decentralization and community control. A case in point is the principals' predicament as reported in the September, 1974 issue of Phi Delta Kappan. Mark M. Krug, professor of education at the University of Chicago investigated various aspects of community control in the Chicago Public Schools. He conludes with several salient comments, especially about the effect of decentralization and community control upon principals. Among other things, he says:

> "_ _ _ _ on the whole, local communities have selected well qualified principals for their schools. This is especially the case when genuine vacancies have occurred and when the selection of the principal was done without undue pressures and when the interests of the children were the paramount criteria in the final choice _ _ _ _ _the repeated injustice done to principals who were made scapegoats lay heavily on on the conscience of many thinking citizens of Chicago _ _ _ _ it may well be that a politically charged atmosphere which is so easily exploited in many many school areas that even the assurance of due process (which has been assured principals) may not be sufficient to keep a competent and un-

> biased principal in his or her job.....on the other hand, however, in each conflict situation, there must be an honest attempt to remedy or alleviate the school conditions which brought about the state of frustration and the grievances of the parents....."

Reports from New York City also cause one to be hesitant about extolling the virtues of decentralization and community control as good ways to guarantee accountability in large school systems.

Program Evaluation - Program evaluation continues to be the "Achilles Heel" of many accountability programs. A reading of the critical assessment analyses of the Michigan Accountability System by House, Rivers, and Stufflebeam in the June 1974 Phi Delta Kappan and the defense of the Michigan program by Kearney, Donovan, and Fisher in the September 1974 issue of the same publication pinpoints the problems of program evaluation. One can generally conclude, from looking over the literature on program evaluation that much more careful attention has to be given to this aspect of the accountability matter.

Personnel Evaluation - Newer methods of evaluating teachers and administrators have developed during the last fifteen to twenty years, even though traditional procedures still out number emerging ones by an overwhelming margin. The newer approaches put more emphasis upon measuring performance in terms of predetermined objectives. This approach puts greater stress upon accountability.

In California, with the advent of the Stull Bill legislation emphasing standards of student achievement, many school systems designed personnel evaluation programs that made pupil performance the primary criterion in the assessment process. An example of this approach was a program in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District. Teachers were held responsible for establishing relevant objectives that would seek to achieve learning outcomes commensurate with the standards of student performance. Programs were designed to attain the objectives

with assessments made on the basis of the extent to which the objectives were achieved. Coupled with the appraisal cycle, in the evaluation program, was an improvement cycle designed to improve the performance of the teacher.

While progress toward adopting newer approaches to personnel evaluation has been slow, the fact that there in movement in that direction is encouraging.

PDK Project/Educational Objectives and Priorities - The PDK program to assist school districts to rank goals according to priority; to obtain community participation in goal determination and program development; to increase community and professional involvement, interaction and communication; to involve community, professional staff and students in assessing perceived needs; to improve teacher and administrator skills in program planning; and to develop a more rational basis for allocating resources to achieve goals and objectives has attracted much attention and widespread participation in this approach to accountability.

So much for some approaches to accountability in education. Now, for some thoughts about what needs to be done from here on:

First, better ways must be found to establish learning standards for students. Admittedly, this is noteasy to do. California school administrators and teachers have scars to show for their efforts in this area. Nevertheless, until we learn how to establish realistic, learning standards for students, we will continue to have difficulty holding educators accountable for their performance.

Secondly, improvements must be made in supervisory assistance for teachers. They need to know what to expect from principals and supervisory specialists. A promising approach to more effective supervision is the process

called clinical supervision wherein practitioner and learner needs are more explicitly defined, learning objectives are formulated, and supervisory assistance is related to those objectives. This approach is more realistic and appropriate if performance evaluation is to be effective as an avenue to accountability.

Thirdly, client needs and concerns have an important bearing upon the accountability problem. This too is a complex problem. Parents and citizens have diffused attitudes and expectations- even contradicting, at times. Communities are often divided. Needs, interests, and wishes may even be incapable of being fulfilled. Yet, failure to be reasonably responsive to them frequently results in apathetic - if not hostile - attitudes towards schools and educators as a whole.

While client demands of the 70's are less volatile and inflammatory than in the 60's, client needs and concerns are as significant a part of the accountability problem as ever.

Another aspect of accountability has to do with superintendent-board of education relationships. The high incidence of turnover in the superintendency is symptomatic of a deeper problem; namely, poor definition of roles, duties and responsibilities for both parties. Performance expectations often are unclear and dimensions of accountability remain undefined. Conflicts between boards and superintendent; charges and countercharges; trials and turmoil exact a heavy toll upon the community, teachers, administrators and students alike. There are many miles to go in straightening out the accountability issue in board-superintendent relations.

Finally, why are we so up tight about accountability? Why does the

term generate feelings of apprehension - if not fear? Probably because we in education are accustomed to measuring our accomplishments in terms of input factors - effort expended; techniques applied; and attitudes exhibited. We do not welcome the opportunity to be judged in terms of results achieved. In fact, we have become adept in rationalizing why it is unfair to be judged by results achieved. We point to the variables we can't control; to expectatons that are unclear; and to the complex nature of the educational process itself. The truth may be that we prefer to play it safe and avoid as much risk-taking as we can. The trouble is, however, that accountability doesn't thrive in such a climate. It is not surprising, then, that our box score of success with the various approaches to accountability is less than impressive.

The challenge is still with us; the need is just as enormous.

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